

RNR 856
CHOU

PEKING, SEPT 6, REUTER -- UNITED STATES SENATOR J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT, LEADING A CONGRESSIONAL GROUP VISITING CHINA, SAID TODAY HE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI WAS IN HOSPITAL AND WAS NOT RECEIVING FOREIGN VISITORS.

CONTACTED BY TELEPHONE AT HIS HOTEL, THE SENATOR TOLD REUTER THAT THIS INFORMATION HAD BEEN GIVEN BY CHINESE OFFICIALS TO AIDES ACCOMPANYING THE DELEGATION.

ASKED WHETHER THE CHINESE HAD SAID THE 76-YEAR-OLD CHINESE LEADER'S HEALTH, WHICH HAS BEEN POOR FOR FOUR MONTHS, WAS DETERIORATING, THE SENATOR SAID HE HAD NOT HEARD THIS.

HOWEVER OTHER DIPLOMATIC SOURCES SAID THAT CHOU, WHO HAS A HEART AILMENT, HAD SUFFERED A SETBACK SOME TIME IN THE PAST MONTH.

ON JULY 31 HE WAS WELL ENOUGH TO ATTEND AN OFFICIAL RECEPTION IN THE GREAT HALL OF THE PEOPLE TO MARK CHINA'S ARMY DAY.

HOWEVER HE HAS NOT APPEARED IN PUBLIC SINCE. HE DID NOT MEET THE VISITING PRESIDENT OF THE WEST AFRICAN COUNTRY OF TOGO, GENERAL GNASSIMBE EYADEMA, WHO LEFT YESTERDAY -- THE FIRST TIME IN RECENT YEARS MR CHOU HAS NOT RECEIVED A FOREIGN HEAD OF STATE.

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ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT AT A FAREWELL BANQUET GIVEN BY THE AMERICAN LEGISLATORS HERE LAST NIGHT, SEVERAL OF THE CHINESE OFFICIALS HAD LEFT ABRUPTLY, AMERICAN SOURCES SAID THIS WAS SIMPLY BECAUSE THE OFFICIALS HAD ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT.

THE OFFICIALS CONCERNED HAD GIVEN PRIOR NOTICE THEY WOULD BE LEAVING EARLY, THE SOURCES ADDED.

THE LAST AMERICAN CONGRESSMAN TO VISIT CHINA, SENATOR HENRY M. JACKSON, WAS RECEIVED BRIEFLY BY PREMIER CHOU IN HOSPITAL IN EARLY JULY.

CHINESE SPOKESMEN HAVE DECLINED TO SPECIFY THE EXACT NATURE OF MR CHOU'S ILLNESS. MR CHOU'S NAME HAS CONTINUED TO APPEAR ON FORMAL STATE MESSAGES.

FOR EXAMPLE YESTERDAY THE OFFICIAL CHINESE NEWS AGENCY HSINHUA ISSUED A MESSAGE PREMIER CHOU SENT TO FRANCISCO MENDES, PRESIDENT OF GUINEA-BISSAU, CONGRATULATING HIM ON THE AGREEMENT WITH PORTUGAL.

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